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ABSTRACT

Issues in the debate in Ireland over Irish language instruction in the schools are reviewed in light of the establishment of the European Economic Community. In the first chapter, three points of view are compared: results of research on Irish, attitudes of the general public, and those of language interest groups. The second chapter provides a brief overview of public language policy from 1922-1950 and outlines results of a 1983 survey of attitudes toward Irish language use and the teaching of Irish to children. Chapter 3 looks at issues of individual and collective rights concerning language usage and attitudes toward use of Irish in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. The two subsequent chapters address primary school and secondary school Irish curricula and instruction in greater detail. In the final chapter, related concerns are discussed, including the growing cultural diversity in Europe, European Community (EC) policy on multilingualism, EC standards for language usage, languages and the labor market, and additional language policy considerations. Contains 19 references. (MSE)

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Páipéar Ócáide
Occasional Paper

Teaching Irish in the Schools:

Towards a Language Policy for 1992

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Teaching Irish in the Schools:
Towards a Language Policy for 1992

Eoghan Mac Aogáin

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Contents

Foreword

1 Research, pressure groups, and the public *1*
Objectivity in the language debate *1*
Similarities of research and public opinion *2*
The assumption of honesty *3*

2 What the public wants *5*
State language policy: 1922-1950 *5*
The coming of the survey *6*
Irish and being Irish *7*
The school programme and its objectives *8*
Summary *11*

3 Compulsory Irish *12*
Individual and collective rights *12*
Primary school *13*
Post-primary school *14*
Third-level education *17*
Summary *18*

4 Irish in the primary school *19*
The Irish programme *19*
Achievement in Irish *22*
Excessive levels of difficulty *24*
Summary *26*

5 Irish in the post-primary school *27*
Examination statistics: 1966-89 *27*
The new pragmatism *28*
The communicative approach *30*
The school and the world outside *31*
Summary *34*

6 Towards a language policy for 1992 *35*
Cultural diversity in Europe *35*
EC policy on multilingualism *36*
The EC language league *37*
Opportunism versus language planning *40*
Educational foundations of multilingualism *41*
Towards a language policy for 1992 *43*

References *46*

Foreword

The debate on Irish has started up again, sparked off this time by the Internal European Market of 1992. There is no doubt that the languages of the continent will be more important to us in the years ahead than they were in the past, and since the school curriculum is already over-crowded it was natural enough to suggest that some of the time allocated to Irish might be better spent on the languages of other member-states.

What we think about this depends, in the end, on the value we set on Irish. If we value it highly enough we will consider it an essential part of our contribution to Europe, and the idea of trying to replace it with other languages in order to be "more European" will strike us as very odd. But many who have a genuine regard for the language are still wondering what the status of Irish should be in our schools when we are more fully integrated into Europe and our young students have the opportunity to be educated as Europeans in ways that were not possible previously. And of course there are those for whom Irish is the symbol of everything that is backward about the country, and who hope that 1992 will be the year it finally goes away.

Much of the debate is predictable enough, and not very enlightening. One has the impression of old battles being fought again on new ground. Yet the time is right for reassessment. The EC is now having to ask again how much its various languages are really worth to it, and what is to be done about them. Its initial decision to make the spoken language of every member state, no matter how small, an official language, was a magnificient concession to less powerful languages. With 1992, however, the emphasis shifts from conservation to communication, and despite many brave statements to the contrary, the two objectives are in obvious conflict. Communication in the EC would be easier if there were fewer languages, and insofar as improved communication is pursued as a goal in its own right, as undoubtedly it will be after 1992, a painful conflict will soon emerge between the languages which are most useful for communication, within the EC and outside it, and those which are less useful. This is why school language programmes throughout the EC no longer reflect multilingualism of the "nearest neighbour" variety that the EC would wish to promote. Instead they reflect the status of European languages on the world stage, English a long way ahead, French still visible but rapidly losing touch, German making a little progress at the back of the field, and the rest trailing off into the distance.

The cultural identity of Europe is at issue here, and as the debate gets under way I think that we in Ireland are likely to feel that we've been through it all before. We will soon be hearing about the cultural and historical reasons for

learning European languages as well as the practical ones. It is ironic that we ourselves are headed in the opposite direction at the moment, urging practical reasons for the learning of foreign languages rather than cultural ones. That is correct too, given our circumstances. But there is a balance to be struck somewhere, and there are already clear indications that on this issue we in Ireland will be listened to carefully in the coming debate. More than any other English-speaking nation we have resisted absorption into an exclusively English-speaking world. And while the success of our efforts is a matter of debate, it can hardly be a coincidence that so many aspects of our culture, in particular our literature in English, appear far more European and far more "universal" than comparable products from other parts of the English-speaking world.

In 50s and 60s we had no need to question the value of Irish in the school programme. The language, we felt, was an essential part of our cultural identity. Ireland without Irish would be lessened as an independent nation-state, and the achievement of political independence would be diminished. I remember, in those years, how *Inniu*, the weekly Irish paper, provided us with a steady stream of clippings from the English newspapers in which Harry Bradshaw, Christy O'Connor, his namesake Frank and even old Yeats himself were all presented by British journalists to the great world beyond these islands as gentlemen of their own race, not of ours. Without the language, the argument went, we would simply be invisible. So learning Irish was not only a way of introducing us to our own history and culture, which would have been reason enough for teaching it, but was also an essential step in maintaining a recognisable presence for the country on the international stage.

This line of thinking was part of yet another European movement which profoundly influenced our history. In the second half of the last century the idea spread across Europe that each nation had a distinct personality which it expressed through its culture, and in particular through its language. It was an idea which found a powerful application in Ireland in the aftermath of the Great Famine. When the fortunes of the country were at their lowest, and there was little in the social or political environment to identify with, the language played a critical role in reawakening the self-confidence of the people, so much so that eventually, with the coming of independence, the ideals of the new state—equality, self-determination, and a rediscovery of those values of everyday Irish life which had been downgraded under colonial rule—appeared to be clarified and consolidated in the goal of restoring Irish as the everyday language of the state.

But in the 1970s and 80s industry and the economy came to dominate the national consciousness, and unglamorous as they were as objects of contemplation they often had more to do with social justice and the quality of life than the old talk about culture and national identity. Anyway, the argument about the Irish

language and being Irish had clearly been overstated. Most people wanted the language to survive. But if it didn't, the English-speaking culture of Ireland, which is now profoundly and irreversibly Irish, was more than enough to be getting on with. Many a powerful nation on the world stage, speaking the language of a former colonial power, has not been as successful as Ireland in making its adopted language its own. The strong argument about Irish and Irishness was also drifting towards the margins of school life. Education was now required to be "practical", meaning in particular that it should teach employable skills, and talk about making students aware of their cultural and historical identity began to sound a bit obsessive and inward-looking. Instead we hear about preparing students for the world outside, including not only the world outside the school but also the world outside Ireland.

I think most would accept that the two models of the school, one looking in, towards personal development in the school setting, and one looking out, towards life after school, are not incompatible. A good education must look both ways. Nonetheless, it is also true that the liberal-humanistic viewpoint, unquestioned for so long, is rapidly giving ground at present, and there are difficult times ahead not only for Irish but also for French, History, Geography, and even for parts of the English and Mathematics programmes as they stand at present. Everything that is not firmly anchored in the world of the school-leaver, with its limited prospects for employment, is being forced to provide new grounds for its inclusion in the syllabus.

The debate should be welcomed. It is not because of sudden changes in the overall level of support for Irish that it becomes controversial every now and then. Attachment to the language, as we shall see, is fairly constant over the last 15 years. In some important respects, support for the language is increasing steadily towards unanimity. The number who say that it is important to them that their children should grow up knowing Irish rose from 60% in 1972 to 70% in 1983, and, in the latter survey, was 80% among young adults. The number who do not want any Irish taught in the schools is less than 5%. The support passes on from generation to generation much as it was. But not the reasons for it, or the educational and social objectives that give it a workable outline. These have to be formulated all over again by each generation, in its own setting, and by ourselves right now, as our impending union with Europe forces on us a new set of questions about who we are and how we want to present ourselves to the rest of the world.

Some tentative answers have been proposed by others, sometimes quoting data collected by ourselves and arriving at conclusions somewhat different from ours. That does not mean that they are wrong. Results are open to different interpretations. But in the search for a general interpretation research is often at a disadvantage because its conclusions on a subject like Irish tend to be scattered around in different research reports. This is how research works, and the reader

who wants to go deeper into the story will eventually have to go back to the individual reports. But there is no reason either why research results on a given topic, the teaching of Irish in the schools in this instance, should not be drawn together into a single account, even if they come from different disciplines and from studies that were conducted originally in response to quite different research questions.

This is just what I set out to do here. The paper, accordingly, owes a great deal to the work of my colleagues in ITÉ, most notably Pádraig Ó Riagáin, John Harris, and Joe Sheils. Almost all of the data reported here, and frequently the interpretation also, have been taken directly, without any further analyses on my part, from work published by Ó Riagáin, Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, Harris, and Harris & Murtagh. I have also had the benefit of frequent discussions with these authors, with the result that I find it hard to distinguish my ideas from theirs in many places. I am prepared to take this as evidence for the view expressed in the paper that research findings tend to converge on the same account, although the convergence can also be interpreted less charitably. In either case my sources cannot be held responsible for my presentation of their results.

In addition to data gathered here in ITÉ I have also made extensive use of the INTO survey of its members and of the general public on the subject of Irish in 1984. I am grateful too for the assistance of the Statistics Section of the Department of Education.

An earlier draft of this paper was published in Irish in *Oghma*.

Chapter 1

Research, Pressure Groups, and the Public

My account of Irish in the schools does not begin until the next chapter. In this one, by way of preparation, I would like to compare briefly the views of language research on Irish with those of the general public, on the one hand, and those of the language interest groups on the other. The reader who is anxious to get on with the story can skip directly to the next chapter. I found it essential to compare the three points of view in order to be sure of my own. Perhaps it will also be helpful for the reader too to know where I stand.

By language interest groups I mean, in the case of Irish, organisations such as Bord na Gaeilge, Conradh na Gaeilge, and Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, and, on the other side, the recently formed Association for Choice in Irish. The objective in the first case is to promote Irish, and in the second, to demote it, not necessarily in any negative sense but simply in the belief that the interests of the nation, educationally and socially, would be better served if some of the money spent on Irish were spent on something else. The language interest groups are to some extent expressing views that are more widely held in the population. But in tone and outlook the views of the interest groups differ strongly from those of the general public as recorded in surveys. This is the difference that interests me here.

Objectivity in the language debate

The old idea that research can put itself above the clash of the interest groups merely by employing technical methods is scarcely defended any more. Many language studies that are technically sound were nonetheless designed to strike a blow for or against some language, and the concern with technique was merely to ensure that the blow would be a good one. Objectivity in social research, and in other places too, does not reside in method but in a certain openness of mind, a willingness to look at the full picture and to accept all of it. It is not a question of detachment, except in the sense of detachment from prejudices. In the more usual sense of the term, a research institute such as ours cannot be detached in any event. ITÉ is obliged by its constitution to do the kind of research that will be supportive of the teaching and maintenance of all the school languages, Irish, English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian. This means that we have to work closely with language interest groups, including language teacher associations, cultural institutes and a variety of societies devoted to one cause or another relating to languages. Among these languages, ITÉ has a special commitment to Irish, which is actually the working language of the Institute.

In this setting, our identity as a research institute is preserved not by adherence to technical methods but by trying to give the most complete picture we can, and, in particular, by giving special attention to data about the wishes of the public. This is why surveys of public opinions have always been an important part of our work. It is our principal protection against theories and explanations that are partial, whatever their technical merits might be.

How successful we are in achieving a balanced picture the reader will have to judge. What I would like to do here is draw attention to three distinctive features that our work acquires because of its commitment to completeness. It is of interest that in each case, the point of view that we adopt aligns us much more closely with the general public than it does with the language interest groups. This is partly because our work is based so firmly on national surveys that we are often, in effect, merely reporting the mind of the public, but also because we, as researchers, share with the general public a definite attitude to Irish which is strikingly absent from the views of the language interest groups.

Similarities of research and public opinion

The fact that there *is* a research point of view needs to be made first, one with no special claims on the truth, as far as I can see, but a genuine point of view nonetheless and not just a stream of disiointed findings. The interest groups are always saying that you can prove what you like with research. True enough, many of our findings are open to conflicting interpretations and they rarely add up to a decisive answer to the big questions the public and the interest groups would like answered, questions about the value of Irish and its future. But neither do they leave you free to say whatever you like. A picture of sorts does emerge, the one I will be presenting inside. It is a little abstract and sketchy, quite unlike those painted in bold strokes by the interest groups. But it has its own coherence and appeal, and there is plenty evidence that on the issue of Irish, as on many others, people are anxious to see what research and the opinion polls have to say before they form their own opinions.

The first thing that research and the general public share is a certain tolerance for complexity. The interest groups need to portray the public in simple and dramatic terms, crying out for more Irish or else calling to be delivered from it. But the views of the public can rarely be summarized so easily. The large surveys of 1972 and 1973 proved this if they proved nothing else. People are not just "for" or "against" Irish, as they tend to be on more policital issues. Public support for certain aspects of Irish is enthusiastic and virtually unanimous. On others it is cautious, particularly if some kind of compulsion is implied. On others still the public is quite cynical and pessimistic. Our account will have to reflect this reality, and accordingly we will not be able to deliver the kind of punchy conclusions that come from the language interest groups.

Research also shares with the public a certain attitude of relaxation, bordering at times on fatalism, a confidence that what people want for Irish is what they will get. Language interest groups are forever shouting "Crisis!", by way of gaining attention I suppose, and they tend to believe, as they must, that they have a large capacity to influence public opinion if they play their cards right. But research data suggest that there is very little slack for the language interest groups to work with. There is no evidence for strokes in the development of state language policy. Certain forms of provision for Irish grow, decline, and give way to new forms. What we see over time is a fairly constant attachment to the language adapting itself to the different circumstances of each generation. This is why we find, at each point in time, firstly, that the provision for Irish in school and society is closely matched to the wishes of the public, and secondly, that the public is aware of this fact, and broadly satisfied with it.

The assumption of honesty

Thirdly, the researcher takes it, as the general public does, that people's views on Irish, be they positive or negative, strongly held or just casually, are still reasonable views, honestly held in the light of the evidence.

It is necessary to make this point because there is a tendency on the part of the interest groups and also among historians and social commentators, including the mass media, to treat Irish as a "hot potato" that brings out all kinds of irrational thinking in people, inconsistency, ambivalence, hypocrisy, sentimentality, and other manifestations of a general feebleness of mind. It is a common view among people with little regard for Irish that our continuing attachment to the language is some kind of national immaturity or even a form of dishonesty. On the subject of Irish, one eminent historian concludes that the people are "willing to deceive themselves in return for certain sentimental or emotional (but not therefore insignificant) satisfactions. Their state of mind on the point may have been neither clear nor honest" (McDonagh, 1983: 125). This is the familiar image of the immature nation clinging to various rag dolls for comfort because it is afraid to grow up. So we get "enthusiasts", "revivalists", "romantics", "Gaelic" instead of "Irish", and even "Gaelicists" and "Gaelicizers" in an attempt to mystify the attachment of the people to the language, since prejudice rules out the possibility that the continuing demand for Irish might be the product of plain common sense and the cold eye of the consumer. Oddly enough the very same assumption is to be found in many expressions of support for the language. Just replace the rag dolls with cultural or artistic symbols and you have the view that Irish is some kind of spiritual protection against the evils of the modern world. I won't be going down this road either.

It is never the hard evidence which compels us to attribute sentimentality or idealism to others. If we can overcome our prejudices we can always find them just as boringly sensible and unmoved as ourselves, plodding away toward goals

12

that they consider worthwhile, using the means that seem most appropriate to them under the circumstances. I will take it that questions about Irish, when put to the public, are no more likely to elicit mystical experiences than questions about seat belts or water pollution. I will be presenting the position of Irish in the schools as a calculated response, on the part of the government, to a reasonable desire of the public, based on reasonable views about the value of the language, and some educated guesses about the best ways to obtain the maximum advantage from it for themselves and their children. The facts, as recorded in a series of comprehensive surveys, among the very best in the world, will readily bear the interpretation.

We have to talk about failure, disappointment, and uncertainty. We have to put up with vagueness. We have to accept that the value of Irish, as the public sees it, is a complicated matter, and can't always be defined very clearly. There can be no certainty either about the outcome of the efforts to maintain and revive the language, only about the willingness to take steps in that direction. But all of these things are part of the reality, not lapses of intelligence. In any event we will find that people are aware of the vagueness and uncertainty too, and take them fully into account.

Reasonable views can still be mistaken. Perhaps Irish is not as valuable as we think. Perhaps the schools cannot do as much for the language as we think. Perhaps Irish does not make as big a contribution to the education of the nation as we imagine. Perhaps it costs us more than it is worth, and in areas we have not even considered. Perhaps the teaching of other languages has fallen behind as a result of Irish being taught so widely. Perhaps other nations, and there certainly are some, who were content to let an older language quietly slip away showed a far more enlightened attitude towards their long-term development. Perhaps the experiment has gone on long enough and it is time now to call a halt. These are fair questions, and I will shortly be looking for answers to them. But if we want to explore them thoroughly, then we must start by assuming that the people who value Irish are normal people, every bit as sensible as ourselves, and the less talk about ambivalence, sentimentality, and such things, the better.

The account in the following pages tries to be complete. All the famous statistics which have been used to argue the case for or against Irish appear here in one form or another. But the impact they have as murderous one-liners in the language debate is always greatly reduced when they are set in the context of other data on the same issue. The fuller picture is always more complicated, less dramatic, almost ordinary. And so it should be, because it takes us all the way back to the everyday reality of Irish, to the people who play little or no part in the language debate, to their considered and far from simple views on the value of the language to them, here and now, and to the successes and failures of their children in learning it at school.

Chapter 2

What the public wants

In 1970 the government set up the Committee on Language Attitude Research to find out what exactly people wanted done about Irish. CLAR, as it came to be known, was headed by international sociologists and linguists. It had a budget of £180,000, a considerable sum at the time. It recruited a research staff and embarked on a 5-year study. By 1973 some 3,000 people had been interviewed in great detail on the question of Irish. The committee delivered its report to the government in 1975.

Ten years later, in 1983, ITÉ, which had been given the CLAR data when the committee was disbanded, redid large parts of the CLAR survey on a new sample of 800 people. I will be drawing heavily on the results of these surveys in what I have to say in this chapter. First, however, let me set the background for the CLAR survey. It was a remarkable event in many ways, and signalled a new approach to Irish.

State language policy: 1922-1950

In the early 20s the new state adopted a programme for restoring Irish which was aimed almost exclusively at school-children. It was felt that political independence would be worth little without cultural independence, and the latter would require a programme aimed at reversing the effects of colonialism. The restoration of the languge to everyday use was the central element in the programme of cultural renewal. The plan was to immerse all children in Irish for the entire period of their schooling, so that in the space of a generation or so, with adequate support from the community as a whole, the language would be brought back into everyday use.

It wasn't always clear how much daily use of Irish the school programme was expected to deliver, and how quickly. Some accepted from the very start that English would continue to be the major language. Some certainly did not. All would have agreed that the the school programme was expected to establish some kind of presence for Irish outside the school.

By the 50s it had to be admitted that the school programme had failed to achieve its objective. It taught a lot of people a lot of Irish in their school years, and left a good many of them with a reasonable smattering of Irish for the rest of their lives, particularly in the passive skills of listening and reading. But this was not the cornerstone of anything in particular. The use of Irish outside the school continued to be virtually non-existent. The Gaeltachts were still Irish-speaking, of

course, but continued to decline just as they had done prior to independence.

In addition, the old view that Ireland without Irish would only be half a nation was losing credibility. Most people would still have liked to be able to speak the language, if it could be arranged. But they didn't feel particularly un-Irish because they couldn't. The idea of an Irish culture expressing itself mostly in English, an idea which was always presented as anomalous in the early years of the state, had now become more acceptable, in large part due to the success of Irish writers in English, whose work was firmly categorised internationally as "Irish". Moreover, among those who no longer considered the Irish language an essential feature of their identity (about a third of the population) there were influential groups who took offence at the whole policy of revival. They felt that they were being treated as foreigners in their own country.

The coming of the survey

When the inevitable reassessment came, in the 60s, it was done in the technocratic spirit of the times. The methods of economic planning, which had been spectacularly successful in their own field, were transferred to language planning. The emphasis was on gathering information, setting objectives, allocating resources, and continuously measuring outcomes. Leading figures from the worlds of finance and management were brought onto Irish language committees, and responsibility for government policy-making on Irish was shifted to the Department of Finance. This indicated the high priority that was assigned to Irish. It also suggested that there might be some hard realities that needed facing up to.

Before we look at figures, a brief word on the presentation of survey data. They are almost all in the form of percentages, rounded to the nearest whole number. (So they do not always add up exactly to 100%.) The source of the data is reported in the heading of the table. The exact wording of the question asked is also given, in italics. Roman type is used for summaries of the original questions that do not correspond exactly to the words used when the data were gathered.

There is a special reason for giving the exact wording of questions. One of the most important findings of the CLAR survey was that the views of the public on Irish are extremely complicated. With the exception of two small groups, one at either side, people are not "all for it" or "all against it". Their views fall in between and change quickly from positive, to negative, to indifferent, depending on what exactly is being said about Irish. A large majority supporting some aspect of Irish will quickly evaporate if, for example, the wording suggests coercion of minority groups. My solution is to give the exact wording always, and to present different wordings where they appear to have an effect on the response.

I do not give exact numbers of people answering, or details of the sampling scheme. The source is always mentioned, and the data can be examined there in greater detail. But the reader can take it that the samples are good ones, 800 or

more, and that the figures are not at all likely to be more than 5% off target. In my commentary on the tables, given the uncertainty due to wording, I will often round the percentages far more drastically to the nearest large proportion, "three quarters", "two people out of three" and so on. The summary I am presenting here does not require any more accuracy than that.

Finally, it should be noted that I will always be talking about the population as a whole, English-speaking Ireland in effect. The Gaeltachts are of course enormously important to the language, as are the Irish-speaking schools, homes, and social networds growing in the urban English-speaking areas. Moreover, their importance extends far beyond the population involved, scarcely 1% of the entire population, to the other 99% with whom they have a complicated relationship. But here the schools I talk about are always ordinary schools in which Irish is taught as a subject only, the schoolchildren are those attending such schools, and "the public" are their parents.

Irish and being Irish

The most general statement that can be made about the value of Irish is that it is somehow important for the identity of Ireland. Without Irish we would be less Irish than we are, as individuals, and collectively, as the Irish. Not everybody believes this, but most do. This is clear from the answers of the public to the the many questions that were asked on the topic in 1973 and 1983. Some typical responses are given in Table 1. Two people out of three believe that Irish and being Irish are connected. Stated the other way around, this means that 1 person in 3 does not see Irish as an essential element in the Irish identity, which helps us to put a figure on the tendency we noted above for many people to separate national identity from the fortunes of the Irish language.

In Table 1, and some of the following tables, I present data for 1973 and 1983 side by side. A small increase in favourable responses to Irish can be noted,

Irish and Irishness in 1973 and 1983 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984:5) 1

	Agree	
	1973	1983
Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture	56%	66%
Ireland would not really be Ireland without its Irish-speaking people	64%	66%
No real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish	72%	73%

amounting to about 5% on average. Why this should be so is not clear. One theory is that the removal of compulsory Irish in the Leaving Certificate is responsible. But that cannot be established with any certainty. I report the two figures merely to make the point that the long-term position is, at least, fairly stable.

At this point in the booklet, fortunately, we don't need to go very deeply into the meaning of "Ireland as Ireland", "real Irish person", "identity", and so on, although I will return to the issue in later chapters. It is sufficient here to say that our identity as a people, whatever it may be in its own right, is considered by many to involve the Irish language, and as a result people feel that steps should be taken to protect it.

The school programme and its objectives

Among the steps to be taken to protect Irish, teaching it to children stands out over all others (Table 2). When a more personal question is asked about having one's own children taught Irish, the position of the language is equally strong, and apparently getting stronger (Table 3).

Priorities for state language policy.
Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984: 24) **2**

The following is a list of areas in which, over the years, Governments have tried to improve the position of Irish. If more government money and effort were now to be spent on improving the position of Irish, which one of these areas should get the greatest attention?

1 *Public services in Irish for Irish speakers (e.g. forms, documents, Irish-speaking officials)*	02%
2 *Irish well taught to all children*	63%
3 *Maintenance of Irish in the Gaeltacht*	08%
4 *Television/Radio programmes in Irish*	09%
5 *More books, magazines, newspapers, etc. in Irish*	05%
6 *All of these*	07%
7 *None*	02%
8 *Don't know*	04%
	100%

Why do parent want their children taught Irish? One answer, the most important one, takes us back to the matter of national identity once more. But it is important to point the question forward also, towards the short-term and medium-term objectives of the school programme. It is an old ploy of the language interest groups, from both sides, to exaggerate the intentions of the public. Irish language

The importance of teaching Irish to children Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984: 6)		3
	1973	1983
It is very/fairly important to me that my children grow up knowing Irish	*Yes*	*Yes*
general public	60%	72%
young adults	—	80%

groups take the figures like those in Table 3 to be a mandate for a linguistic revolution throughout the land. And since the revolution is not happening they argue that the school programme must be stepped up. Opponents of Irish love to describe the objectives of the school programme in grandiose and fuzzy terms, "the Gaelicization of Ireland", "the revival of Irish", and so on, suggesting that the public, on the subject of Irish, is dreaming, and that the project "has failed" in some definitive sense and should therefore be abandoned.

I take it that the objective that parents set for the school programme is more or less the one it achieved in their own case, a fairly thorough exposure to the language right through their school years, resulting in a pattern of language use in adult life that we now know quite well (Table 4), a fair degree of passive competence in the population generally, with various degrees of more active use of the language among very small minorities.

This is the notorious syndrome of the *cúpla focal*, the few words, which exasperates supporters of Irish so much. They feel that with a small effort a lot more Irish could be heard in everyday life. This is undoubtedly true insofar as people's ability in Irish greatly exceeds the use they make of it. When *Lá na Gaeilge* or *Seachtain na Gaeilge* comes around many people are able to function through Irish at a level that would be regarded as entirely adequate in bilingual settings around the world. Many more would quickly join them if the experiment were to continue for a month or two. But still there is no point in talk about insincerity or lack of will-power. When Irish tries to move out into daily life the attraction it has for us meets a force of the same kind, many times stronger, which pushes it back in the opposite direction, namely our facility with English, our familiarity with it, and our sense of being completely at home with it.

It may be said that the public must surely be expecting more than the *cúpla focal* for its huge educational investment in Irish. But if people continue to be attached to the language and use if very little, the only thing that follows for certain is that it is valuable to them in ways that do not require it to be used. It is important to them just to know that it is "there", that it respected as the historic language of Ireland, that their children can learn it in school, that it is safe from the danger of extinction, for the forseeable future at any rate, that it has all the

18

Irish in everyday life (a) INTO/MRBI, 1985: Tables 11, 12; (b) Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984: 16-22; (c) Census of Ireland, 1981	4
I speak Irish a lot[a]	03%
Irish or Irish phrases are used in the home often/always[b]	05%
I read an Irish article with past month[a]	09%
Can you recall if you participated in a conversation in the past week in which you used Irish? (Yes)[b]	09%
I speak Irish now and again[a]	11%
I can read (Irish) with no help[b]	15%
Since leaving school have you used Irish in conversation? (Yes) (Often + Several times)[a]	18%
Can speak Irish[c]	32%
I listened to Irish news on TV/Radio: Within past month[a]	33%
Do you watch programmes in Irish on TV? (Daily + A few times a week + Less often)[b]	72%
Rate your ability to speak Irish (The odd word at least)[b]	84%

essentials of a modern European language, with the capacity to respond to whatever opportunities arise for growth in the future

People are easily satisfied in the matter of Irish. The *cúpla focal* are enough for most of them. But they do require it, and are prepared to pay dearly for it. Moreover, there is an urgency and open-endedness in the public's attachment to Irish which prevents us from describing it as "tokenistic". It is not for the sake of some vague Ireland of the future that they want it. It is for here and now. They want to hear it around them, they want to see their children working at it and using it. And they do not set limits to what may come of all this, as the word "token" again suggests. The road is open for Irish. People are pleased to hear Irish spoken in unexpected places, and they have welcomed developments like the all-Irish play-schools and primary schools and Raidió na Gaeltachta. Compare this

with the hostility that hems in languages like French and Spanish in North America, and one realises that the "apathy" of which the public is often accused is strictly relative.

If we confine ourselves to the data we have no grounds for attributing lack of realism or sincerity to people in connection with Irish. We can't even show that they are unhappy. Whether we think of the confidence with which parents demand "The same again" for their own children, or the one million who feel that the schools made them into Irish speakers, the least we have to conclude is that the school programme is widely considered to be effective. And in some important respects it undoubtedly is. If we look far back enough, to the founding of the state, a lot of people have been taught a lot of Irish, the language itself has developed the full complexity of a modern European language, and it is now sure to survive well into the next century, something which did not look in the least likely at the beginning of this one.

Summary

About two thirds of the population consider Irish an important part of the identity of Ireland. The most important step they wish to be taken to protect the language is to have it taught to children in the schools. The objective of the school programme is an extensive exposure to the language during school years, a good level of passive competence thereafter, limited active competence, and a supportive attitude towards those who wish to use the language more extensively.

Chapter 3
Compulsory Irish

The things the public wants done about Irish clearly require government intervention. Tax-payers' money must be spent on the project, school time must be given to it, and the effort must be nation-wide. English-Irish bilingualism, even in the very modest forms that are achieved by the present school programme, cannot be maintained without a state policy designed to counteract the large forces pushing us towards an exclusively English-speaking world, external, nation-based forces from other parts of the English-speaking world, and internal forces emanating from our own long association with English, our mastery of it, and our attachment to it. To become a monoglot English-speaking state in a generation or two all we have to do is nothing. From this point of view, teaching Irish to our children is an objective like road safety, or a clean environment, or the welfare of disadvantaged groups. It is a struggle against large forces of inertia, and there is no hope of progress without a state programme of incentives and disincentives. Nobody can seriously claim to support causes like these and, at the same time argue that they must be brought about on a purely voluntary basis. That would be just a roundabout way of abandoning them.

Individual and collective rights

But of course many people are prepared, for all practical purposes, to abandon Irish, or at any rate to assign it a much lower priority than it enjoys at present. Consequently there is a heavy obligation on the state to ensure that the inconvenience to them is warranted by the gains to the majority. This involves us with the notorious conflict between individual and collective rights, a conflict that fuels many another debate besides the one on compulsory Irish. Opponents of Irish can make a strong case that they are a coerced minority. They have no great interest in the language. Why should their children be forced to learn learn it at school? The reply is that the inconvenience to the minority is mild, no worse than the same minority willingly endures in other contexts as the price of being different, and that it is not really personal inconvenience that motivates the protest but a desire to influence the identity of the state, something which would have very definite implications for the majority. And so it goes on.

Research has little to say here, except perhaps to suggest that the conflict of individual and state on the matter of Irish cannot be quite as stark as all that. The damage the minority does to the fabric of the nation by effectively opting out of its Irish language programme can hardly be quite as severe as supporters of Irish

claim. And the talk of the minority about "coercion" is a little bit sensational if it refers to the inconvenience of having to study Irish. The degree of intensity that any school language programme achieves is limited, in any case, by the interest of the students and their parents. The fanatical teacher ramming Irish down the throats of unwilling learners is mostly a creature of moral indignation. Pedagogically the feat is quite impossible. In practice the demands that a national language policy makes on different sections of the community are modified by the level of interest aroused, a fact that is readily seen in the regional and social class difference in Irish ability throughout the state.

But if research can say little on the moral and philosophical issues surrounding compulsory Irish, it can still say a good deal on the particular kinds of compulsion that do exist, and the attitudes of the public towards them. This is the material I now present, first for primary schools, and then for post-primary. Irish requirements for third-level institutions must be included too, as a matter of concern in their own right and also because of their implications for first and second level.

Primary School

A look at some figures concerning compulsory Irish in primary school (Table 1) shows at once that the subject is delicate. Small changes in wording can cause very large differences in the response of the public. Essentially the same school

Compulsory Irish in the Primary School 1
Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984: 25)

Of the following school programmes, which one would you consider most suitable for most children today?

a *All English (with no Irish taught)*	03%
b *Irish as a subject only*	72%
c *All Irish with English as a subject only*	04%
d *Some subjects taught through Irish*	
(1) *More subjects through English than through Irish*	04%
(2) *About 50/50*	16%
(3) *More subjects through Irish than through English*	01%
	100%
Irish taught as a subject, at the very least (b+c+d)	97%
All primary-school children should learn Irish (Public)	62%
INTO (1985:14) *All primary-school children should learn Irish* (Teachers)	42%

programme, the current one, namely Irish taught as a subject but not used as a medium for teaching other subjects, is supported by 97% of the population, when described benignly as the "preferred" programme for "most" children, and by only about 60% (40% among teachers) when it is described more bluntly as "All students should learn Irish". For this reason there is not much point in looking for a single figure for attitudes to compulsory Irish. It all depends on the kind of compulsion conveyed by the question. If it is the enlightened variety almost everybody supports it. According as it begins to sound more strong-armed and coercive, resistance increases towards 50%.

Language interest groups have naturally looked for the wording that gives them the best figures. But if we are prepared to put percentages aside and talk in slightly more general terms, the position of the public is nonetheless clear enough. People want Irish taught to all children provided there is no undue coercion. This is not as empty as it sounds because we have a good deal of information, direct and indirect, on the kind of compulsion the public considers "undue". People do not, in general, support the use of Irish to teach other subjects. It is true that All-Irish primary education is still growing in popularity, and demand for it (25%) exceeds provision about 5 times (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984: 21). Part-Irish education also has some support. But there would not be broad support for Irish-medium instruction as a norm. Even when Irish is taught as a subject only, people are concerned about children whose parents do not wish them to learn Irish and children with low achievement (Table 2). Admittedly these statements are of

Exceptions to Compulsory Irish in the primary school — 2
Public: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984:15)
Teachers: INTO (1985:14)

		Agree
Children whose parents object to their being taught Irish should not be obliged to learn the language	(Public)	66%
	(Teachers)	47%
Children who show low academic achievement levels should not be obliged to learn Irish	(Public)	56%
	(Teachers)	60%

the blunt variety that suggests high levels of coercion. We may take it that more delicate wording would remove some of the elements of compulsion that the respondents are rejecting. Nonetheless, the views expressed are solid ones, and they are the principal reason that a large section of the public which has generally positive views about Irish still will not endorse strong statements like "All primary-school children should learn Irish". They fear coercion of minority groups. On the other hand, when due allowance is made for minorities with special requirements, the teaching of Irish to primary school children is accepted as the norm by a very large majority, well over 90%.

Post-primary school

The public makes no distinction between primary and post-primary schools in its general views about the preferred programme for most students (Table 3). The figures are more or less identical with those already presented for primary school (Table 1). This is the benign wording, of course, and we do not have any other for the post-primary school. But it is safe enough to assume that the primary figures would be repeated more or less had similar questions been asked in post-primary schools. With regard to Irish, both in terms of attitudes and actual achievements, the picture changes very little as we move from first to second level, a fact which will be borne out again in later chapters.

In recent history, however, "compulsory Irish" was identified principally with the requirement in post-primary schools to study *and* pass Irish in order to get a Leaving Certificate. This was removed in 1973, and is duly recorded in the public's awareness (Table 4). But there is a time-lag. Evidently people tend to think of school in terms of their own memories as much as the contemporary realities, particularly if they do not have teenage children attending school. Even in 1983, 10 years after compulsory Irish, in the strong sense, was removed, 40% of the public thought it was still there.

Compulsory Irish in the Post-Primary school — 3
Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984: 7)

Of the following school programmes, which one would you consider most suitable for most children today?

a *All English (with no Irish taught)*	04%
b *Irish as a subject only*	72%
c *All Irish with English as a subject only*	04%
d *Some subjects taught through Irish*	
(1) *More subjects through English than through Irish*	04%
(2) *About 50/50*	15%
(3) *More subjects through Irish than through English*	01%
	100%
Irish taught as a subject, at the very least (b+c+d)	96%

Public awareness of examination requirements in Irish — 4
Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1984: 8)

	1973	1983
Many children fail their exams because of Irish	77%	40%

This has to be taken into account when interpreting figures on "compulsory Irish". The words mean different things to different people, and if the differences are not acknowledged, overall figures can be misleading. In late 1988 there was still a good deal of uncertainty about the degree of compulsion obtaining in post-primary schools (Table 5). Some 20% didn't know what the Irish requirement was, and an additional 17% thought the pre-1972 requirement (passing Irish) still stood.

The data reported in Table 5 were gathered in response to an MRBI poll conducted a little earlier on behalf of the Association for Freedom of Choice on Irish. It had reported that 77% of the public did not wish Irish to "remain a compulsory subject for the Leaving Certificate" but wanted it rather to become "a subject of choice". But in the light of the level of misinformation reported in Table 5, the 77% *must* include both respondents who didn't know what "compulsory Irish"

Public awareness of Irish requirements for the Leaving Certificate (Bord na Gaeilge/MRBI, 1988) — 5

	Yes
a *All pupils are required to study Irish and must pass an examination in Irish in order to obtain the Leaving Certificate*	17%
b *All pupils are required to study Irish, but do not need to pass an examination in Irish to obtain the Leaving Certificate**	58%
c *Pupils are not required to study Irish nor to pass examinations in Irish to obtain the Leaving Certificate*	04%
d *Don't know*	21%
Misinformed or didn't know (a+c+d)	42%

* The actual requirement

really meant, and others who took it to be the pre-1973 version. (See Ó Riagáin, 1988). A negative response would have been likely in either case.

This view was substantially confirmed by further questions put to the respondents who provided the data in Table 5. Having been informed what the actual position was, namely that students had to study Irish but did not need to pass it, they were then asked whether they preferred this arrangement to the two others mentioned, studying *and* passing, and neither. A majority of 64% preferred the existing arrangement, and an additional 7% wished a return the pre-1973 situation (Table 6). Thus 71% supported the present form of compulsion at the very least. Here again we find that existing provision for Irish shadows the wishes of the public quite closely.

The public's preferred Irish requirement for the Leaving Certificate (Bord na Gaeilge/MRBI, 1988)	6
a *All pupils are required to study Irish and must pass an examination in Irish in order to obtain the Leaving Certificate*	07%
b *All pupils are required to study Irish, but do not need to pass an examination in Irish to obtain the Leaving Certificate**	64%
c *Pupils are not required to study Irish nor to pass examinations in Irish to obtain the Leaving Certificate*	21%
Present requirement at the least (a+b)	71%

* The actual requirement

Third-level education

Irish is compulsory for admission to two kinds of third-level institution, the colleges of the National University of Ireland, and the Colleges of Education. The views of the public on this arrangement are shown in Table 7. About a third of

Views of the public on Irish requirement for entry to 3rd-level colleges (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984: 27) — 7

At present, unless a student was educated outside the Republic, a pass qualification in Irish (Leaving Certificate standard) is necessary for entry to most of our Universities and to certain other third-level institutions. Do you think that this should be required for entry to:

	Yes	*No*	*Don't know*
All Universities	35	60	05
All National Institutes of Higher Education	34	60	06
All Colleges of Technology and RTCs	29	64	07
All Teacher Training Colleges	68	27	05
All other colleges	32	60	08

the population would not require Irish for entry to any third level institution. Another third would require Irish for entry to all of them. A third would require it for Teacher Training Colleges but not for other 3rd-level colleges. This means that

the Irish requirement has substantial majority support in the case of the Colleges of Education, but not for third-level education generally. Once again the questions are blunt. The "All" suggests inflexibility, as with the "All children in primary school should learn Irish" above in Table 1, which meets with very strong resistance, even from people who would nonetheless support the teaching of Irish as a general rule. Given the diversity of third-level institutions that now exists, and the fact that colleges in the same category can still have quite different traditions with regard to Irish, it follows that more specific questions about the implementation of an Irish requirement for each college in its individual setting may be more useful in the future than blanket questions about third-level institutions in general.

The views of the public on the Irish requirement for Colleges of Education is no doubt linked to its wishes to have children taught Irish, coupled with the fact that every primary teacher in this country must be a competent teacher of Irish—and English, and Mathematics, and all the other subjects as well. Specialization by subject is not permitted. Two unpleasant consequences are: (1) a good standard of Irish is required of entrants to colleges of Education, meaning that some applicants who would probably make excellent teachers in every other respect are rejected because of very poor ability in Irish, and (2) primary teachers trained in other countries are not allowed to teach in Irish schools until they get suitable qualifications in Irish, which again results, no doubt, in many excellent teachers being excluded solely because they have no Irish. Both regulations can appear harsh, particularly when contrasted with the lack of concern for Irish which is shown by the general public outside the school setting. Yet if we concentrate on the public's wishes for what should happen in the school, they are in fact minimal steps, given the commitment to single-teacher classrooms and the teaching of Irish to all children.

Summary

People want Irish taught to all children during their school years, from primary school right through to Leaving Certificate. They want it taught as a subject, but not used to teach other subjects. They are concerned about the rights of two minority groups, children with learning difficulties, and children whose parents do not want them to study Irish. There is majority support for the Irish requirement for entry to Colleges of Education, but not for entry to third-level colleges generally.

Chapter 4

Irish in the Primary School

People want their children taught Irish, and for this reason are prepared to accept the kinds of compulsion just described. The question now is how much Irish the children actually learn in school. This has been the subject of considerable research over the last decade. In 1978 ITÉ, in conjunction with the Curriculum Development Unit in the Department of Education and the Educational Research Centre, initiated the project Spoken Irish in Primary Schools in order to develop objective tests of Irish speaking and listening skills in primary school. Since 1978 the tests have been administered by external examiners to over 10,000 pupils in primary schools. It is on the published reports of this project (Harris, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1988; Harris & Murtagh, 1988) that this chapter will be principally based.

In addition we have an important INTO survey of its members (of whom some 10,000, or about 50% responded) on the subject of Irish in the primary school. This was conducted in 1984, midway in the test programme, and helps to fill out the picture from the standpoint of the teacher.

The Irish programme

In the typical primary school Irish is taught as a school subject only. It is not used to teach other subjects, although it may be used casually outside the Irish class. Typically as well there is little or no Irish spoken in the local community or in the home. About 80% of all children are in schools of this sort (INTO, 1984: 16). The remaining 20% are divided between Gaeltacht, All-Irish, and part-Irish.

It should be noted, however, that even when Irish is not used for teaching other subjects, it may still have a considerable presence as a "school language" in another sense (Table 1). It may be used in greetings, in general "organizational" exchanges between teachers and pupils, and in conversations between teachers. Three teachers out of four report that greeting and requests are commonly in Irish, and half the teachers report children speaking Irish spontaneously to teachers. About a third report children speaking to each other in Irish. Nine teachers out of ten respond in Irish when spoken to in Irish, a fact which any frequent visitor to primary schools can vouch for. This informal use of Irish around the school impresses visitors from abroad, since the foreign languages taught in primary schools in other parts of the world never have the "national" status that is needed to get them used outside the language class. This is one of the few teaching resources available to Irish which is not available to foreign languages.

Informal use of Irish in the primary school (INTO, 1985: 9) **1**

In your school, apart from classes in Irish, how often does each of the following occur:

	Always + Often
Teachers speak to each other in Irish	74%
Instructions, greetings, requests in Irish	74%
	Always + Often + Sometimes
Teachers speak to pupils in Irish	46%
Pupils speak to [illegible]hers in Irish	42%
Pupils speak to each other in Irish	35%
	Yes
I speak Irish when spoken to in Irish	93%

Irish is usually taught early in the day. The week's work is organised around some attractive theme, a story, an adventure, some recurring dramatic event in childhood, going on holidays, the doctor, a day at the sea, the changing seasons of the year, Christmas, Halloween, and so on. With each of these is associated a small set of words and grammatical structures, and the lessons are arranged in sequence through the school year and through the entire period in primary school, from infants to sixth class, so that the children will progress towards a command of the essential elements of the spoken language as they move through the school. The week's work is sequenced also, moving from passive learning (learning by heart, learning to understand, learning to imitate), through various drills of the language structures involved, to active use of the language acquired in the early stages in new contexts. Oral and visual aids (cassettes with speech and songs, filmstrips, puppets) are widely used in the early stages of the lesson, and there is a gradual transition to writing and speaking.

This is the general approach described in the *Nuachúrsaí*, the official series disseminated in the late 60s, with accompanying film-strips, puppets, and cassettes containing songs and speech. But the series was never intended to replace every other approach, nor did it do so. The best figures we have indicate that Nuachúrsaí are used on their own by about 40% of teachers and, in conjunction with the older oral-aural methods, by another 45%. The film-strips are used, and approved of, by over 70% of teachers. The music cassettes are used by over 50% of teachers and are also found satisfactory, and the *deilbhíní* or puppets are similarly used and approved of by 40% of teachers.

The percentage of the school day spent teaching Irish is difficult to determine. Self-reported figures are around 15% for infant classes and 20% thereafter (Table 2). All the available figures, however, including these, are biassed upwards to an

Percentage of school day devoted to Irish. Mac Aogáin (1981: 3)	2
Infants	15%
Grades 1,2	20%
Grades 3,4	21%
Grades 5,6	21%

unknown degree, since some teachers, correctly from one point of view, insist on counting the time spent teaching other subjects through Irish as time spent

Attitudes of teachers to the amount of time spent teaching Irish (INTO, 1985:16)	3
Would you rather	
a *spend more time teaching Irish?*	12%
b *teach Irish for the amount of time you usually spend on it?*	63%
c *spend less time teaching Irish?*	19%
d *stop teaching Irish altogether?*	04%
Present allocation at least (a+b)	75%

Attitudes of the public to the amount of time spent teaching Irish (INTO/MRBI, 1985: Table 6)	4
Do you think more, less, or the same amount of time as at present should be spent on teaching Irish?	
a *more*	22%
b *less*	23%
c *same as at present*	52%
d *no opinion*	04%
Present allocation at least (a+b)	74%

teaching Irish. It would actually be quite difficult to estimate the extent of this bias. All we can say is that the true figures are lower than those shown in Table 2.

From a research point of view the figures are not of great importance. Irish has a substantial presence in the curriculum by any standards and will probably retain it for the foreseeable future, since the present time allocation, at the very least, is supported by a large majority of teachers and the general public, as is shown in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Achievement in Irish

Before we present figures for the outcomes of the school programme, a word on the tests that were used to measure them.

Béaltriail Gaeilge ITÉ, or the ITÉ Oral Test is in fact two tests, a listening test which the pupils take in a group, and a speaking test which is administered individually. Separate tests exist for 2nd, 4th, and 6th grades. Both the listening and the speaking test are administered by inspectors. In the former the pupils listen to a tape and mark off the correct answers in an answer booklet. In the latter the pupils are asked a fixed list of questions by the examiner. The entire test, listening plus speaking, takes about 90 minutes and is generally broken up into 2 sessions.

There are some 135 items or questions in the test. All are based on specific objectives of the existing syllabus. Some are open questions, about such things as the pupil's favourite toys or pastimes, or the content's of his/her schoolbag. Here the pupils will get credit for any answer that conveys the intended meaning, even if there are mistakes in the Irish. The test is scored by gathering together items corresponding to particular language skills. When the items are added a score of 75% is taken to indicate "mastery" of the skill in question.

Some 10,000 pupils have been tested by now, and looking at some representative figures (Table 5) the most striking finding is that the picture for the period between 1978 and 1985 is reasonably stable and in fact improving slightly, with about 5% more pupils, on average, achieving mastery in 1985 than did in 1978. This conflicts with the popular view that Irish in primary school is going downhill steadily. The latter may be based on selective memories of heavily streamed classes of 20 years ago. Or it may also be based on events in the 70s, where there is some evidence for a decline in reading standards in Irish, although even then, as Harris notes, teachers were divided fairly evenly on whether standards in oral Irish were improving (36%) or disimproving (42%) (INTO, 1976). Or it may just be, as Harris (1988: 16) again suggests, that dissatisfaction with the Irish course, for which, as we will see, there are some reasons, leads to an over-critical assessment of results. In any event, if we confine ourselves to listening and speaking skills and the years 1978-85 there is no evidence for decline but rather the opposite.

But if the results are stable, or even improving slightly, they are also poor.

Percentage of 6th-grade pupils in ordinary schools attaining mastery of objectives in spoken Irish in 1978 and 1985 (Harris & Murtagh, 1988:104)

5

Year:	1978	1985	
Listening Objectives — Number of pupils:	1,984	2,211	Gain
1 Sound discrimination	74.6	84.4	9.8
2 Listening vocabulary	30.9	42.0	11.1
3 General comprehension of speech	41.6	48.5	6.9
4 Understanding the morphology of verbs	16.2	26.9	10.7
5 Understanding the morphology of prepositions	26.9	33.8	6.9
6 Understanding the morphology of qualifiers	21.0	30.5	9.5
7 Understanding the morphology of nouns	7.5	16.6	9.1
Speaking Objectives			
8 Pronunciation	58.7	65.0	6.3
9 Speaking vocabulary	21.8	23.0	1.2
10 Control of the morphology of verbs	10.4	12.0	1.6
11 Control of the morphology of prepositions	21.1	27.9	6.8
12 Control of the morphology of qualifiers	21.8	27.7	5.9
13 Control of the morphology of nouns	19.2	21.4	2.2
14 Control of the syntax of statements	17.8	19.6	1.8
15 Control of the syntax of questions	17.9	23.2	5.3
16 Fluency of oral description	41.0	50.0	9.0
Mean percentage of pupils who attain mastery of objectives 1-16	28.0	34.5	6.5

The percentages achieving "mastery" on any given objective is only about 30% on average, and sometimes much lower. Even when the "pass mark" of 75% is adjusted downwards to 40%, to indicate the number of pupils making at least "minimal progress" towards an objective, only about 66% still make it. This does not mean, as has been said, that the remaining third of the pupils learn no Irish at all in primary school. What it means is that a third of the pupils will, at any given time, have made no progress towards the objectives set for their present grade-level. Even these pupils generally measure up to the objectives for lower grades. In fact virtually all pupils leave primary school with definite amounts of Irish, even if they fail badly on a test of 6th-class objectives. But this is little consolation to the teacher in the classroom, who has to work with a set of objectives that are permanently beyond the capabilities of a large number of the pupils.

Excessive levels of difficulty

With test results as poor as this one would often conclude that the test was too difficult. But the test is firmly anchored to the same objectives the teachers have to teach in the classroom, and 40% attainment is hardly asking too much. It is not the test which is too difficult but the course. There are many arguments, some of them slightly technical, why this must be so. The reader who wants to look more closely at them is referred to Harris (1984: 133-134) and Harris (1988: 14-15). They all come back to the comparison between different kinds of primary schools, Gaeltacht, All-Irish, Part-Irish, and Ordinary, which shows that pupils in ordinary schools are achieving just about what one would expect, given that a class a day is their only real exposure to the language. The trouble therefore is not with the results themselves, which are reasonable given the resources, but with the course, because it looks for results that are more realistic for Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools. On this score, it is surely of significance that the course for ordinary schools is in fact widely used in all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools.

Unrealistic goals cause two problems. First, they make everybody feel bad about things that couldn't really have been much better. More importantly, they shrink the syllabus, directing all attention towards a goal that will materialise only for a few, namely functional fluency at the end of 6th class, and discouraging the development of alternative goals for everybody else. In the modern jargon, the course has a low surrender value. It just aims for the stars and hopes for the best, with the result that if pupils do not go all the way to functional fluency they are left with fragments of Irish that cannot be easily drawn together and integrated into a higher-level course. In fact, in terms of conversational ability they can appear to amount to next to nothing. This a well-known source of discouragement for teachers and the general public when they compare speaking ability here and now with the hundredes of hours spent learning Irish.

It is important to be clear on what exactly is wrong. It is the lack of attainable long-term objectives for the Irish programme that causes most discouragement among primary teachers. If we consider the contents of the programme, the language, the stories, the teaching aids, and the experience of the teachers in teaching it, the picture is satisfactory enough (Table 5). A large majority (73%) of teachers describe their attitude to the teaching of Irish as "enthusiastic". Teaching Irish is by no means an unpleasant experience for them. But when we move from the teaching to its outcome we encounter massive dissatisfaction (Table 6). Eighty percent feel that the effort put into Irish is not repaid. And they estimate, as the tests do, that only about one pupil in three masters the language as intended by the course.

It follows from all of this that the course is too difficult and should be modified at once, preferably, as the teachers indicate, "by a representative body of teachers, linguistic experts, and inspectors" (INTO, 1985: 23). The principal modifications are obvious enough. The new syllabus must take into account the degree of

Teacher attitudes to the content of the Irish course INTO (1985:18, 14)	6
	Yes
Is the structure of the Buntús lesson satisfactory?	60%
Is the subject-matter of most of the Buntús lessons suitable for the pupils you teach?	69%
Is the language-content of the Buntús suitable for the pupils you teach?	64%
Is the vocabulary ... suited to the interests of most of your pupils?	63%
As regards your attitude to teaching Irish in your school, are you	
enthusiastic?	73%
indifferent?	22%
opposed to the teaching of Irish?	02%

Teacher attitudes to the results of the Irish course INTO (1985: 16, 19)	7
	Agree
The results obtained do not reflect the amount of time spent teaching Irish.	81%
The expectations of the syllabus in Irish cannot be achieved within the amount of time available.	71%
	Yes
Can most of your pupils use the speech-moulds in various contexts?	33%
Do most students know the vocabulary and speech-moulds learned in previous years?	30%

environmental support for Irish in the school, in the home, and in the local community. It must accept that there are strict limits to this support in the majority of schools. At the same time, results show that environmental support can be developed, and that even a little progress here will make a large impact on overall

levels of achievement in the classroom. While the themes of the *Nuachúrsaí* need not change a great deal, the orientation will have to be quite different according as more realistic objectives are set for the functional use of the language. The grip of prose narrative on the proceedings will have to be loosened in order to admit a greater variety of language forms. Listening skills should be introduced as objectives in their own right, not just as steps towards speaking. Links between the teaching of Irish and the teaching of English must be developed, in conjunction with language awareness modules in both languages.

Summary

The Irish course taught in the ordinary primary school is too ambitious, given the modest levels of support for the active use of the language outside the classroom, in the school, in the community, and in the home. While this does not appear to have greatly effected the enthusiasm of teachers for the language, it is essential now that the course should be rewritten to match it more closely to the forms of support for the language that do exist beyond the classroom. The language programme as a whole, English and Irish, should also be modified at the same time to facilitate the introduction of continental languages and to create a stronger element of language awareness in the teaching of all languages in the primary school.

Chapter 5

Irish in Post-Primary Schools

It would be strange if the position of Irish in the schools changed drastically as we moved from first to second level. And indeed it does not. After all, we are talking about the same students, a few years on, and about the same home background, and these, we know, are the big factors determining how much students will learn in any school subject. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, if we soon find ourselves discovering that a third of the students in second-level schools are making no progress towards the objectives that have been set for them, that some of the objectives are unrealistic, and so on.

Examination statistics: 1966-89

The examination statistics for Irish over the last twenty years tell us most of what we need to know. A detailed analysis and commentary can be found in *Irish and the Educational System: An analysis of Examination Results* (An Coiste Comhairleach Pleanála, 1986). Table 1 below, which is adapted from Table 8 of the report, tells enough of the story for present purposes. It shows percentages of students taking the higher paper in Irish in the Leaving Certificate, the percentage failing Irish, and the percentage not sitting the examination. The same figures for English are presented on the left for purposes of comparison. The number of students taking the examination per single student in 1966 is indicated on the left.

There is a loss of some 30% in the higher course, and the number of those failing or not sitting climbs towards the same figure in the same period. The decline may remind us of those maps showing the Gaeltachts gradually disappearing into the sea in the course of the last century. But examination statistics have a more complicated relationship to life outside the school. They don't measure language use, or attitudes to language, or even attitudes to language examinations—not necessarily at any rate. Most of the dramatic shifts observed in examination statistics over the years are due to changes in the examinations themselves, or changes in the population of students taking them. The four-fold increase in participation in second-level education during the period, and the retention, at least in part, of 1966 standards for marking examinations explains most of what we see in Table 1. As the school population expands to represent the population as a whole and not just the 20% who did the Leaving Certificate in 1966, the standards come down to their "real" level. The apparent loss, taken together with the soaring participation rate is of course a gain for the population as a whole.

Percentage of students taking the higher paper (H), failing (F), and not sitting (NS) Irish and English in the Leaving Certificate. Various years, 1966-1989. The second column (N) shows the number of students taking the examination per single student in 1966. From *An Coiste Comhairleach Pleanála* (1986: 14). 1

		Irish			English		
	N	H	F	NS	H	F	NS
1966	1.0	53	4	1	66	5	1
1968	1.2	49	3	2	66	5	1
1970	1.5	42	5	2	55	12	1
1972	1.9	33	4	3	36	7	1
1974	2.1	31	5	4	40	5	2
1976	2.6	28	8	7	40	7	3
1978	2.9	24	9	8	42	7	5
1980	2.9	26	12	8	46	8	1
1983	3.5	23	16	10	44	7	3
1987	4.0	23	17	13	48	6	2
1989	4.3	21	14	12	47	6	3

Not all of the decline in the position of Irish can be explained in this way, however, as is obvious is we switch our attention to the figures for English on the right of the table. Here too we see a sharp descent from the high standards achieved when second-level education was not generally available. But then the curve levels off according as the school population stabilises. In fact the percentage taking the honours paper in English is now rising slightly again. Irish, on the other hand continues to decline right through the 70s, long after the impact of the enlarged school population should have been absorbed. Worse still, the numbers failing or not taking the exam grow steadily towards 30% through the period, while they reach only about 10% for English and then stop, which again is what we would expect if the growth in the school population were the only factor involved. So if Irish is not as badly off as the table at might first suggest, it clearly has a problem not shared by some other subjects.

The new pragmatism

It is not too difficult to guess what it is. Irish is no longer as "important" in the minds of second-level students and teachers as it once was, not at any rate in the context of job opportunities and entry to third-level education. We have already seen that the public consider it "important" that their children should be taught

Irish well in school. The figure is somewhere between 70% and 80%, and rising. And even when the public is asked to name the subjects they consider to be "the most important which children should learn in school", without much specification of the meaning of importance or the level of the school, Irish does not come out badly (Table 2). It is rated the third most important subject, a long way behind Maths and English, it is true, but a long way ahead of all the other subjects, including Science, History and Geograpy, and the practical subjects. But when the context is narrowed still further, and people are asked about the important sub-

2

Responses to the open question, *"What do you think are the most important subjects which children should learn in school?"* (INTO/MRBI, 1985: Table 1). Quoted in Ó Riagáin (1986: 9)

Mathematics	81%	*Geography*	13%
English	73%	*French*	08%
Irish	34%	*Woodwork*	08%
Science	15%	*Home Economics*	08%
History	13%	*Computers*	04%

3

Responses to the multiple-choice question, *"How important do you consider each of the following subjects to be, for SCHOOL LEAVERS today?"* (INTO/MRBI, 1985: Table 2. Quoted in Ó Riagáin, 1986: 9)

Very + Fairly important

Mathematics	98%	*Science*	86%
English	98%	*French*	76%
Home Economics	89%	*Irish*	64%
Wood/Metalwork	87%		

4

Percentage of students rating different subjects *"useful"* (Hannan et al., 1983: 34. Quoted in Ó Riagáin, 1986: 11)

Biology	90%	*Physics*	78%
French	88%	*Irish*	52%

jects "for school leavers today", Irish moves to the end of the list (Table 3). A similar result is found when Leaving certificate students themselves are asked to rate subjects for "usefulness" (Table 4), a term which in their situation is probably close in meaning to "important for school leavers".

True, this unfavourable rating for Irish is in a fairly narrow context, the one I am identifying with employment prospects and entry to third-level education. Answers to different questions make it clear that the public recognises that school subjects can be important in other ways too. Nonetheless, the difficulty for Irish is that "usefulness" in this sense, narrow or not, is now a major factor in the classification of school subjects. Formerly "usefulness" was something that was spread far more evenly over the subjects. In a sense it was education that was useful, not the individual subjects. Nowadays, perhaps as a result of the improved access to education, the subjects themselves are beginning to be sorted into two groups, the useful and the not so useful. Formerly the not-so-useful subjects were French, History and Geography, as indicated by high failure rates. Irish has now joined them, and the split is beginning to look much more like scientific and practical subjects on the one side, and the humanities subjects on the other. English and Mathematics will always straddle the divide, of course, being at once towering products of the humanistic tradition and subjects of great practical importance into the bargain, the former as the mother tongue of the great majority and the most powerful international language of our times, and the latter as a *lingua franca* of another kind, that of science and technology. But in fact the very same conflict which these subjects conceal because of their dual role is taking place within them as the practical-scientific group tightens its grip on the second-level syllabus as a whole and begins to call into question the humanistic core of all school subjects, including English and Mathematics.

The communicative approach

With the announcement of the new Junior Certificate Irish syllabus in 1988, the transition from a traditional, humanistic syllabus for Irish to one that is practical or "communicative" was officially under way. Twenty years ago, a visitor from Mars looking over the syllabi for Latin and French would get only the odd indication that one of the languages was still spoken. The same is true, incidentally, for many adult self-instructional courses. *Teach Yourself Modern Greek* still differs hardly at all from *Teach Yourself Classical Greek*. The idea was that you learned a language by learning the words and how to put them together, and whether the language was alive or dead was beside the point. Nowadays, the *use* of the language, active and passive, in the full range of situations that can be imagined for it, in the class and outside, is the starting point of syllabus design. In the case of a living language *use* will include telephone calls, scribbled notes, letters, weather forecasts, menus, cooking instructions, poems, short stories. A basic principle of the communicative approach is that the language presented to

the learner is embedded as much as possible in its normal context of use, fully loaded down with the distinctive characteristics it acquires in that setting.

Equally as important as "communication" and "authenticity" are the notions of "autonomy" and "learner centering". Courses should be designed around the interests of teenagers, and as well as learning a particular language they should also be learning to learn *a* language, and how to take personal responsibility for learning it. Many students will be able to make only limited progress towards fluency in the school setting. But to achieve some degree of learner autonomy in the process will be as important to them in the long term as any collection of "set piece" skills in a particular language. By giving the learners even a little autonomy, the school does far more to bridge the gap to the world outside than it will ever do by loading down its language courses with bus timetables, newspaper clippings, and other specimens of "real" language. Reality, in the matter of language learning, is not so easily pinned down.

The development of a communicative programme in Irish for post-primary schools in the coming years is an interesting and challenging prospect. Moreover, the existence of two quite different Irish syllabi, the primary and the post-primary, both changing for different reasons in different settings is a definite asset. It gives us a better idea of options and likely outcomes, and it moderates the expectations we might have for syllabus reform on its own.

The changes in post-primary school are largely changes in syllabus content, prompted for the most part by comparisons with the new communicative syllabi in French, German, Spanish, and Italian. In keeping with the spirit of the new modern languages programmes, dissatisaction with the old Irish programme was directed at the excessive prominence of reading and writing, the restricted range of text-types (literary texts for the most part), and the absence of materials from contemporary Ireland, including urban, English-speaking Ireland. Everything seemed to happen down in Peig country. The same criticisms do not hold for the primary syllabus. Here the materials were written by teachers and inspectors for the most part, with clear didactic purposes, they have a good range of text types (stories, songs, rhymes, puzzles, etc.). In addition, their principal focus is the life of the child, which makes them relatively neutral on the ideological divide between Gaeltacht and Galltacht. Comparison with communicative courses in other languages is also a lesser factor in the primary school. The primary Irish course has always had a strong elements of the communicative approach, in particular its emphasis on the use of Irish as a school language. It is not course content which bothers the primary teachers, as we saw, but the unrealistic outcomes it is expected to deliver.

The school and the world outside

There is, however, a common theme to our account of Irish in the primary and post-primary schools. It is the importance of factors beyond the control of the

teacher. These include the position of Irish in the home and the community, and, in the case of the post-primary schools, the importance of Irish for employment and entry to third-level education. We can safely conclude that these are factors which will bear down just as heavily on the new communicative syllabus for Irish as they did on the traditional "classical" syllabus of the past.

It is necessary to make the point because the transition to a communicative syllabus in the post-primary school is often described bluntly as a transition from school Irish to everyday Irish. Certainly the new course will have a lot more of the Irish we use to greet our friends and to have conversations, and less literature. However, one has the uneasy feeling that some of the expectations now being formulated for the second-level syllabus seem to be going back to the old idea that the schools can "drive the country into Irish" by teaching students to speak everyday Irish and then turning them loose after the Leaving Cert. The primary schools have been down that road, with far greater resources than the second-level schools will ever have at their disposal, and with a syllabus that in many ways was far more communicative than the second level can ever hope to have. If they did not increase the use of Irish outside the school neither will the post-primary schools.

The reason that school Irish doesn't survive very well in the everyday life is not because it is school Irish but because there is nothing to do with it. School Irish never stopped anybody who had a worthwhile use for the language. Those who believe that by teaching a new kind of Irish in the schools they will close the gap between the school and the world outside will be quickly disappointed. This is the old biological solution: dose the children and wait for old age to remove the others. (This method will not even change miles to kilometers.) The weaker version of the argument, that students taught everyday Irish will be more likely to participate in whatever little Irish exists outside the school is fallacious too, since it is chiefly motivational and social factors which determine language use outside the school, not levels of competence, and still less the kind of Irish taught. This is why we now have a growing sub-population of people who had all-Irish education and never speak a word of the language.

In fact, the distinction between school Irish and everyday Irish, which appears great to those who can recall their first efforts to speak Irish in the Gaeltacht, is not at all so obvious if we think only of English-speaking Ireland and students with average levels of competence and interest in the language, i.e. the majority of our students. For them school Irish is the only Irish they will encounter regularly. It is not sufficient that the language tasks set in the second-level Irish programme fit into some vision of an Irish-speaking community outside the school. (The first communicative syllabi now look more like anthropological documents than educational ones.) It is even more important that the new programme should fit into a model of language involvement that is meaningful for the students in the classroom setting. And an essential element in the classroom

setting, in both primary and post-primary schools, is that many students know that in all probability the school is the only setting in which they will ever encounter Irish on a continuous basis.

A good language course challenges students, to be sure, and makes them achieve more than they had planned. But this is no excuse for monolithic courses that make no allowance for different types and levels of interest. For a great many of our students Irish has to remain a "school" subject in some important senses. There is little likelihood that they will ever use it outside the class, and we may be sure of two things, firstly that they are well aware of this fact, and secondly, that it has an important bearing on what they consider sensible behaviour for themselves, as students, while they are in the class. They will be anxious to find out as much as they can about the language, within their own limitations, and they will value this knowledge, at least to the point of wanting their own children to have it also in due course. This group, which is a majority, will have to be catered for on its own terms. At present many of them are forced into forms of involvement with the language, in writing and speaking, which are not based at all on their interests but on some vision of an Irish-speaking Ireland. These, no doubt, are the people who just drop the whole thing.

There are several possibilities for the students who do not wish to take Irish as an examination subject. One is to shift the focus more in the direction of language awareness. In language awareness modules, the language is taught with special reference to its distinctive features as a language, those it shares with its closest relatives, and those which set it apart from other languages. Another is to build in modules with a high "surrender value", little blocks of language that can be quickly revived when and if the student decides on further Irish lessons in adult and continuing education. Another is to focus on particular areas where Irish has a genuine everyday life, the media, the Gaeltacht, Irish-speaking households in the Galltacht. Modules on related content areas, such as "Communications", "Language", or "Bilingualism", done through Irish, could also be introduced. But whichever route is taken, the over-riding need is to make learning of Irish attractive and rewarding for the students, where they are, studiously disregarding the implications of the course for life outside the school, so that the regard in which the students will hold it as young adults, something that seems assured regardless of what happens in second level schools, will be matched more closely to the language courses they followed there, and the courses themselves will have a greater possibility of being retrieved and renewed later in one form or another of adult education.

In case of misunderstanding, I am not talking here about courses of the Irish Studies variety, dealing with aspects of Irish culture other than the language, such as music, art, or folklore. We are lucky that some elements of the historical culture, most notably the music, have survived much better than the language. Some of our students will find much more in them than they will in the language.

They will also find that they have kept open avenues of communication with continental countries which have mostly dried up in the English-speaking world, and thus they have an important role to play in our reunion with Europe. But when people say that they want their children taught Irish there is no basis for assuming, as some opponents of Irish have done, that they really mean Irish Studies, and for this reason I will not deal with the subject here.

Summary

The number of students failing Irish in the Leaving Certificate or not sitting the examination is moving towards one third of the student population. This is partly the effect of the increased participation in second-level education in the 70s and 80s, and also because Irish has declined in its perceived importance as a school subject relative to the scientific and practical subjects. The Irish course now needs to be matched more closely to the different levels of interest and ability that exist in the student population.

Chapter 6

Towards a Language Policy for 1992

Looking at EC language policy in relation to our own, as I will do in this concluding chapter, the first thing to strike us is a similarity. The EC too is stuck with a conflict of ideals and realities. It scrupulously speaks of all the languages of the member states as equals, from the strongest to the weakest. It acknowledges no pecking-order among them, and always talks as if contact between each pair of them is an entirely symmetric affair. At the same time it knows well, and accepts to a considerable degree, that English is rapidly becoming the inter-state language of Europe.

Cultural diversity in Europe

The growing acceptance of English as a *lingua franca* in Europe does not in any way undermine the EC commitment to multilingualism, any more than our own acceptance of English makes our attachment to Irish less genuine. Any regular visitor to the continent knows how people living there value the linguistic and cultural diversity around them. Everywhere there is the strong awareness of the existence of the "other" countries, those irreducible, impenetrable masses lying all round on the peninsulas, islands, and mainland of Europe in such amazing diversity and intactness. This is Europe, and this is how it wishes to remain. In practice it means that the opportunities for getting to know Europe are, for any given individual, extremely limited indeed. But people are glad that the diversity exists, and are anxious for it to continue, as a kind of permanent enrichment for the world in general, and a potential personal enrichment for themselves and their children, should they choose to learn more about the "other" parts of Europe.

This is similar enough to our own attitude to Irish. Irish, for us, is like the gateway to another country within. It has all the appeal of a foreign country, and yet it is also our homeland, more so in some ways than the everyday world we live in. Most of us never get round to exploring it in any depth, but we like to know that it is still there. Had it survived into this century with the kind of intactness that other EC states have, we would no doubt have a modern Irish-speaking culture to-day that could take its place among them as an equal. But while history conferred us with many gifts, cultural independence was not among them. Since the time of the Tudor conquest Ireland has been absorbed to a great degree, almost entirely in the matter of language, into the culture of England and the English-speaking world. Still, the Romans never made it here, to pave the way, as it were, for the later conquests, which accordingly were all the more difficult and

less complete. And the great religious division of Europe, for obscure geographic and military reasons as much as cultural ones, went straight up the Irish sea and gave us, ever since, a degree of separateness from England for which "independence" is far too weak a word. So, while in many ways we have been absorbed into the English-speaking world, in many other ways we have not, with the result that we can step backwards and forwards with ease between the English-speaking world we share with Britain and America and the more private and personal world of Ireland.

EC policy on multilingualism

Our concern to maintain both worlds is the exact counterpart of the EC's own efforts to maintain the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe. Its first step was was to make the spoken languages of all member states official languages of the community. This constitutes the foundation of EC language and cultural policies. The rule that was followed was quite uncompromising. The daily language of any member state, no matter how small, is regarded as an official language of the community. This divides the members into two groups: Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, in which the historical language is still the daily spoken language, and countries in which the most prevalent daily language is that of another member state, Belguim (French, Flemish), Ireland (English) and Luxembourg (French, German).

There are problems with the rule, naturally. The most serious is one that doesn't affect us greatly in Ireland, namely the frequent mismatch of political and linguistic boundaries. In order to have any rule at all, the EC had to start with the political map, a somewhat blunt instrument in the matter of language policy. At present about 50 million people in the EC, almost one in six, speak languages that are unofficial, at least in the area in which they are spoken. Some thirty languages, Irish among them, are currently listed. Some of them are just pieces of official languages that stick out over the state boundary, and would disappear if the political boundaries were redrawn slightly. But most are not. A few of them define internal political boundaries that are just as real, for the people living near them, as the external ones.

The first step taken by the EC to look after the unofficial languages was to set up, in 1982, the Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. But "lesser used" doesn't really mean any more than non-official (for whatever reason) and it doesn't follow that the languages so classified have anything else in common. The problem for Irish was that its strongest feature, its status as a national language, got lost in the new classification. With the exception of Letzebourgish all the other lesser-used languages are regional languages, very large regions in some cases, with millions of native speakers, but still regions in the sense that they have only a limited significance for the states that contain them and speak on their behalf. Irish, on the other hand, like the official languages, co-incides with the

political boundaries, and thus allows our government to speak for the language on behalf of everybody. Thus while there is no sense to the argument that Irish might have been made an official language of the EC in the full sense, its actual status would be reflected far more accurately by giving it a reduced status among the official languages than by numbering it among the lesser-used languages.

Until the recent introduction of the new Welsh syllabus, which will require for the first time that all pupils in Wales learn some Welsh, one had to go as far as Canada to find a good comparison with Irish. In English-speaking Canada the second language, French, has a national status, and is taught to all children during their school years. All-French primary education is now common across Canada, even in parts that never had French-speaking communities. Canadians have decided that French is an important part of their identity, particularly in the context of their proximity to the United States. And they are prepared to make the educational investment necessary to ensure that their children know the language, in much the same way that Irish parents want their children to know Irish, even if it clear that only a very limited competence is likely to be achieved, because of the overpowering, and fully-accepted presence of English beyond the walls of the classroom.

There the comparison ends. French was never the historical language of Canada in the way that Irish was here, and, on the other hand, French is a prestigous international language, which Irish certainly is not. Even so, the fact remains that that no language in the EC, with the possible exception of Welsh, is quite like Irish.

The EC Language League

When the category of "second language" is not present alongside "first language" and "foreign language", language statistics on Ireland can be interpreted as unkindly as one wishes. Had Ireland survived as an Irish-speaking state, it would now have a high degree of Irish-English bilingualism, comparable, I suppose, to Welsh-English bilingualism in parts of Wales, or Danish-English bilingualism in Denmark. In addition, Irish, as the language of a sovereign state, would be an official language of the EC. So we could all chalk up 2 EC languages straight away, a first language, Irish, and a foreign language, English. This would put us well ahead in the EC language league, close to the top. As it is, we now have to learn two languages, one and a bit anyway, to qualify as full members of our own state. In the meantime our score on foreign languages stays at zero.

So the *Eurobarometer* shows that we are the worst country in the community for foreign languages, with the Italians, the Portuguese, and the British a short neck ahead (Table 1). The figures provoke the predictable "aren't we awful" response in the mass media. But they could not in principle say very much about the performance of our schools since they are determined chiefly by two factors over which schools have little control, *demand* for individual languages, and *contact* between them.

Percentage of people in EC countries who speak a foreign language *"well enough to follow a conversation"* (EC, 1987)			1
Luxembourg	99%	France	33%
Netherlands	73%	Spain	32%
Denmark	61%	United Kingdom	26%
Belguim (Flemish)	53%	Italy	25%
Belguim (French)	45%	Portugal	24%
Germany	40%	Ireland	20%
Greece	34%		

Demand for languages is simply how badly they are wanted, which may be taken, for practical purposes, as the amount of school time they receive. The figures in Table 2 will do as a rough approximation. English, clearly, is the language in demand. About 3 out of 4 young people on the continent

Percentage of people in EC countries who were taught various foreign languages (EC, 1987)		2
	All ages	Aged 15-24
English	51%	75%
French	42%	53%
German	33%	37%
Spanish	18%	21%
Italian	21%	20%

are now being taught English, and the figure is rising sharply (Table 2). This is foreign language learning too, of course. But not the kind the EC had in mind for 1992. In fact it has nothing much to do with the EC or 1992, but with the pre-eminence of English as a world language.

Contact is just the degree of exposure between pairs of languages, amounting to the opportunities for learning them outside the school setting. Geographic proximity to the target language, and the extent of its presence in the media are the two most important elements. Demand and contact combine most powerfully in Denmark and the Benelux countries. They stand at the intersection of the three languages most in demand, English, French, and German, and there we find the highest figures for language competence. Contact with the high-demand lan-

guages declines on the southern periphery, in Spain and Greece, for example, according as we move away physically from the high demand languages. But demand for them, for English in particular, is still high there. So we get intermediate levels of language competence. Only in Ireland and the UK, on the north-western periphery, do we find demand and contact both at a low ebb. We cannot give our students reasons for learning continental languages that are as valid, in purely objective terms, as the reasons that continental students have for learning English. And in addition we are isolated from the continent, Ireland even more than England.

An important reality of 1992 is that the *necessity* for the English-speaking nations to learn continental languages is going to be less, not greater, according as the surging demand for English takes effect in continental schools. In spite of genuine aspirations towards multilingualism, the new EC language-teaching programme, LINGUA, and related programmes such as ERASMUS, will not be able to counteract in any way the democratic decisions of the students of the member states concerning the foreign languages they wish to learn, and to that extent, they will *de facto* be largely programmes in English for continental students. They will consolidate the status of English as the inter-state language of the EC and reduce still further the need, in the strongest, economic senses, of the English-speaking states to learn continental languages.

On the other hand, *contact* with continental languages, and *opportunity* to learn them, will be greatly enhanced. By far the most exciting thing about 1992 is the prospect of being drawn more closely into Europe and becoming acquainted with other member states in a way previously enjoyed only by the continental countries. Telecommunication is improving and travel is becoming easier. Exchange schemes for teachers and students are building steadily. If the projects planned are successful, it will be as if Ireland, for purposes of language learning, were to be moved physically towards the centre of Europe. This inevitably will lead to a new awareness of ourselves as Europeans, and, if we manage things properly, a greater knowledge of the languages and cultures of Europe.

We in Ireland have a special reason to welcome all of this. Our new union with Europe after 1992 will also be a re-union. It is only in the last century or two, since our incorporation into the English-speaking world, that our international orientation has been tilted east-west, away from Europe, east to England and west to America. Historically it was quite different. In early Christian times we faced south-east towards Europe. Not for any profound ideological reasons but simply because there was no place else to go. And our contribution to Europe then was just as impressive as our later contribution to the English-speaking world. From about 1000 AD settled communities of Irish academics, speaking Irish and Latin, at the very least, were to be found in Cambridge, London, Leyden, Paris, Nancy, Berne, Milan, Turin, Florence, Rome, Vienna, Münich, Dresden, Würzburg, and even as far east as Kiev. With 1992 the road to the continent will be wide open,

and we will have an opportunity to be Europeans in a way that has not been possible for us for many centuries.

Opportunism versus language policy

I separated demand from contact as factors in language learning because I believe it is a mistake, and potentially a very damaging one, to back up the case for learning EC languages with talk about jobs on the continent. And it is an even more disastrous mistake to think that schools might try teaching foreign languages on a "take-away" basis, as long-distance apprenticeships for jobs overseas.

Ironically, it is the same mistake made again and again in our efforts to teach Irish. The school is not a black box that can be programmed to deliver social objectives. Students will not be bullied into learning other languages by talk about jobs any more than they were by talk about national identity. They know well enough, much better than their parents it seems, that English will do quite nicely until such time as their future takes a more definite shape. Even then it may be more than enough. Most of them, some 75-80%, will remain in the English-speaking world anyway, whether here, or in Britain, or in the English-speaking world beyond the EC, in the US, Canada, and Australia.

Even in the case of the 20% who will go to the continent, there are few grounds for thinking that languages, rather than other school subjects, are their best bet for getting jobs. As native speakers of English our students are already well beyond the point of diminishing returns for additional language learning. Even if we could know for certain which students would end up looking for work on the continent, we could still not say with any certainty whether their long-term interests are best served now, in their remaining school years in Ireland, by teaching them more languages rather than, say Computer Studies, or Woodwork, or for that matter, Home Economics or Art History. Most jobs will be given on the basis of the skills and qualifications needed to do them. Language skills will be a secondary consideration, especially for native speakers of English. And as for the jobs where language is important, they will either be the kind that requires good levels of fluency, well beyond anything the second-level schools can be expected to provide, or else the kind for which on-site training, with a supportive educational programme, is the most efficient and realistic means of learning. In either case the competence that a school programme can be expected to provide will be of limited value.

If the talk about languages and jobs could be taken as over-enthusiasm there would be nothing much to worry about. But to suggest to the general population of our young people in second-level schools that learning EC languages increases their job prospects in not only untrue, but actually trivializes what is happening to Europe right now, and shows scant understanding or appreciation of the foundations of our school language programme. For the element of self-interest it introduces into the language debate is no basis at all for a multilingual school pro-

gramme. The very same opportunism that argues for more EC languages in 1990, given the present pattern of emigration in Europe, will argue for something different when the pattern changes. (One hopes the recent influx of East Germans into West Germany has shown up some of the shortcomings of the new pragmatism as a basis for educational policy.) If jobs for our children here in Ireland are threatened in years to come by emigration from the EC, the argument from self interest will translate effortlessly into an ugly "English only" movement of the kind now gathering force in many parts of the US. Self interest will go wherever the jobs are, towards multilingualism in various circumstances, and towards staunch unilingualism in others. In either case it assigns no intrinsic value to language. It is merely a means to an end. And thus it destroys the foundations for a coherent language curriculum.

The school programme, spread out over many years, with its distinctive classroom setting, has to aim for a far greater generality in its objectives, and its success in doing so is an important part of the "freedom" that comes with education. The school can take responsibility for language education only in a very broad sense. Not because of any allegiance to old ideals of "broad" education, but just because we have no idea where the students might end up. Much effective language learning will remain permanently outside the school, in settings closer to the work-place, and it makes no sense to try to bring it into the school. The objectives of the school language programme have to remain one step back from practical applications in order to cover a good many of them. In the end its highest objective should be "autonomy" for the language learner, a certain ease with languages, a positive attitude towards language learning, and a confidence that languages can be learned for practical use, slowly but surely, when and if the circumstances permit.

Educational foundations of multilingualism

For the same reason, a broad base in student interest and motivation is far more important for a multilingual school programme than the presence of any particular language or any application of it. We are fortunate here because of the wide differences, in motivation and course content, between the three main languages taught, English, Irish, and French. The New Opportunism, on the other hand, suggests a single motive for all language learning, namely "communication" in some vague sense. So we are asked to imagine all the languages of the curriculum, including the mother tongue, competing with each other for the same chunk of the education budget, or the school day, or the student's brain.

There is no such subject on the curriculum as "Language", nor is there any such person in our schools as "the language teacher". Instead there are the individual languages, currently English, Irish, French, German, Spanish, and Italian. They are not slices of anything. Each has found a space for itself on the curriculum without any help from the others. They are unique focal points of interest and

expertise that have developed over the years in response to public demands and educational interventions, teacher training in particular. We value English as the daily language of Ireland, and, as it happens, as one of the great languages of the world. It is also a language on which we have left our own unmistakeable mark. We value Irish as the historical language of Ireland. We want it to survive because we would like to retain as much we can of the older Irish-speaking culture of Ireland, and with it, something of the cultural diversity that characterized Ireland for many centuries. We value French as another of the great languages of the world, and one with an unexplainable appeal for English-speaking people, and with a long history of association with English. Given the different motives and interests of parents, students, and teachers that are presently tied up in these languages, there is no certainty at all that the niches currently occupied by any one of them could be successfully occupied by another. A loss for any language is a loss for all of them, according as the range of interests served by languages as a group gets narrower, and the non-language subjects move in to take up more and more of the high ground of employment potential. And it is undeniable that there will be a net loss to language teaching in general, and to the educational system as a whole, if some new order of "importance" among languages results in language teachers having to move sideways to teach languages they don't really know.

While the argument about foreign languages and jobs is groundless and devalues the position of languages as a group in the syllabus by narrowing its motivational base, powerful reasons of another kind exist for trying to get more students to study EC languages, and not only these, but also the languages most used in contacts between the EC and the world beyond it, notably Russian and Japanese. They are part of the world we live in. And they are now converging on us as never before. Economic and telecommunications developments are shrinking the globe. We are being drawn in from our isolated perch on the edge of Europe and in a short number of years we will be confronted with the languages and cultures of our closest trading partners in a way that was previousiy possible only for those who could travel and work abroad.

Even if the crude linking of languages to jobs is mistaken, the new language courses should still acknowledge fully that our re-union with Europe in the 1990s will be taking place largely for economic reasons. They should give a prominent place to our business connections abroad. They should tell us more about the daily lives of young Irish emigrants working on the continent and less about tourists. They should draw attention to the emergence of the language professions themselves, which will develop greatly because of the increased inter-state contact. We should hear more about the work of translators and interpreters and other branches of the emerging "language professions". And the teaching of languages for vocational purposes, which will go on mostly outside the regular post-primary programme, should nonetheless be given a high profile within the

regular language courses so that the latter can be extended naturally in that direction for the minority of students who go that route. In other words, our language courses should reflect the new world order that is developing in our international relations, and highlight the economic factors that are bringing it about.

Nonetheless, if we are searching for a solid foundation for a multilingual school programme, talk about jobs will not work. In the end we will have to go all the way back to the old-fashioned human interest in knowing something about other languages and cultures. With England on one side of us and America on the other, other languages will not exactly be thrust on us. And strictly speaking, we will not need them. This will be even truer after 1992 than it is now. In order to persuade our children to learn languages we must teach them to love them. And if we cannot do so with Irish, which has so many advantages in terms of its immediacy and its deep personal appeal, we will have few reasons to think that we can succeed with the languages of continental Europe and others further afield.

Towards a language policy for 1992

The most immediate task now is to broaden still further the motivational base for language learning in the schools. Firstly, we need to increase the number of languages. German is already emerging with a strong new identity, corresponding to the identity of Germany itself as the dominant economic force of the EC. So the practical and commercial use of the language is strongly to the fore in our language course. That is how German, unlike Irish or French, is making its way into the schools, and it is important that the school programme should reflect this fact. Spanish also will steadily increase its profile in the schools, partly because of renewed interest in the cultural contacts of our country with Spain in the past, but more importantly because of the increasing awareness of Spanish as a world language, something that is no doubt much clearer in the minds of our young emigrants in New York and San Francisco than it is to us here in Ireland. It is a great pity that only a handful of students are taught Italian. But there is great vitality in effort, and one can only hope that when the talk about jobs subsides, and the exchange and travel schemes take their effect, Italian will finally take the place that on our language programme that reflects something of the country's status in Europe.

Similar comments apply to the other languages, whether from the EC or outside of it, that have little or no presence in the schools as the moment: Dutch, Danish, Russian, and Japanese, for example. All we can do now is build a bridgeheads and wait for the times to change. One thing is certain however. If 1992 means anything at all to the cultural life of the community and the country, the numbers taking the individual languages in our schools should soon begin to match more closely their importance, in every sense, historical, cultural, demographic, economic, within the EC, and in the relations of the EC to the world

beyond it. If we are unable improve the weakest language in the schools, which is Italian, then we are unlikely to do much for languages in general, except push students around from one to another within the territory achieved over the years by the existing programme. If that is all that happens, then 1992, for all its importance in other respects, has nothing much to offer the language education of our children.

The introduction of a foreign language in primary school is clearly desireable but poses problems because two other languages, a first language and a second language are already present. This is a new issue which will undoubtedly be the subject of debate in the years ahead. All that can be said with certainty now is that those who urge foreign language teaching in primary school to give the children a "head-start" are probably mistaken. If we are talking about teaching specific communicative skills, then older children, starting later, will quickly catch up anyway and the alleged advantage will be lost. And in the meantime the reception classes of post-primary schools will be faced with severe problems according as unpredictable portions of their intake turn out, effectively, to have already done part of the course.

If, on the other hand, we could switch the emphasis from communicative skills to language awareness, then the "head-start" argument makes some sense. One cannot start too early to develop children's acceptance of multilingualism, their enjoyment of languages, and their confidence in being able to master languages later on, in their own time, as the occasion demands. Anything that can be achieved here will provide a handsome payoff right through the school years and afterwards. But then the achievements of our existing English and Irish programmes in this regard are not to be disregarded, and the implications of adding a third language will have to be carefully worked out, preferably in a series of experimental programmes.

Another aspect of diversification is the preparation of language courses for "special purposes". I have been arguing that modules of functional language make little sense in the school setting. The school language course retains its contact with future applications by envisaging a good many of them, and by building in packages of language that can be retrieved later in work settings. We cannot guess what special purposes will be relevant for the students. But we can teach them *how* to learn *a* language, and illustrate it with a language course designed with some pragmatic setting in mind, the tourist and catering industry, computer technology, or just general survival in everyday life.

As for Irish, the only thing that is certain is that people will still want it to live on in its own way. They will want it taught to their children in much the same way it was taught to themselves, they will feel reassured that they have some passive knowledge of it, and they will be anxious for it to find as many new forms of existence for itself in Europe as is possible. And there is no doubt that Europe in 1992 will be quite receptive to some aspects of our distinctive bilingualism,

and we ourselves will find reasons for the use of the language on the continent that have no counterpart yet at home--the acceptance of multilingualism, the expectation that people will have a language that is uniquely "their own", the availability of translation services in formal settings, and the urge, which undoubtedly grows stronger on the continent, to escape every now and then from the tiresome sense of exposure that comes with speaking English all the time.

We should look forward to the coming language debate in Europe. It is clear already that continental educators and policy-makers will be greatly interested in our particular form of school-based bilingualism, created and maintained as it is in the heart of the English-speaking world. President Mitterand took us by surprise recently when, in reply to some question or other about missiles in Europe, he broke off to speak about the identity of Europe and the need to protect languages such as Irish, a language which is "European" in a way that English or Spanish can never be again, now that they are established world languages (Government of France, 1989: 11). His comments will be followed by many more in the same vein in the years ahead. The attitude of the continental countries to our language policies is going to be alarmingly positive, and is going to force us to think again about the achievements of a system that we are inclined to take too much for granted. We are already held in high regard on the continent as an English-speaking nation, partly because of our disproportionate contribution to contemporary literature in English, but, more importantly, because it is a contribution which has been uniquely European. At the same time we have taken the necessary steps to ensure the survival of the historical language of Ireland and developed a modest form of bilingualism for all when it seemed the older language was gone forever. Thus we retain link with an Ireland that was more linguistically and culturally diverse than the present one, and keep open avenues of contact with Europe which long since been closed off in other parts of the English-speaking world. (Look how much the survival of our native music has done already to bring us closer to Europe.) Our foreign language programmes too have been remarkable, when they are compared, as they must be, with similar programmes in the UK, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. If we except parts of anglophone Canada, our French programme is beyond compare, and even if our German, Spanish, and Italian programmes are smaller than we would like them to be, they too are of the highest quality.

I take all these achievements as products of the same basic respect for languages, the same instinctive resistance to that monoglot condition which is now regarded as normal in most of the English-speaking world. Together they provide secure foundations for the extended programme of language teaching that is now needed for our reunion with Europe.

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